

TRIBUTE TO SHEILA ISHAM

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I wish to pay tribute to the life and work of one of our Nation's great artists, Sheila Isham, on her 80th birthday.

Sheila was born in New York City, 80 years ago today. She grew up in Cedarhurst, just outside the city, and on an 80-acre island in the St. Lawrence River in Canada, which for years lacked both electricity and running water. She graduated from Bryn Mawr College in 1950 and married Heyward Isham, an officer in the U.S. Foreign Service, and the couple moved to Berlin. There began her path to becoming an artist.

Sheila became the first foreigner to gain admission to the Berlin Art Academy in the years following World War II. There, she studied with Hans Uhlman, a student of abstract painter Kasimir Malevich, and absorbed the works of Wassily Kandinsky.

In 1955 Heyward Isham was posted to the American embassy in Moscow, and the Ishams moved to Russia, where life became very restricted. Sheila has told of having to import several years' worth of food from outside the country, of being watched and followed constantly, and of being unable to meet with other artists or to draw freely. A 2004 profile in the St. Petersburg Times reported that "once, Isham was almost arrested by a vigilant Soviet officer who noticed that an American was drawing a building, which, according to Isham, turned out to be a center for KGB interrogations."

But Sheila continued her work. She met George Kostakis, a prominent collector of the Russian avant-garde, including works by Malevich, Kandinsky, Tatlin, Popova, Goncharova, and Larionov, and she traveled through Georgia, St. Petersburg, Yalta, Sochi, and Tbilisi to sketch and meet with local artists and writers.

After a few years back in the United States, Sheila and her family traveled to Hong Kong, where she would live and work for 5 years. She taught contemporary arts at the Chinese University, exhibited her work in China and Japan, and studied with a master of classical Chinese calligraphy. "I chose calligraphy because it seemed to me to be abstract and perfect at the same time," she said.

On her return to America in 1965, Sheila began painting, exploring colors and the nexus between Eastern and Western cultures. She would later live and travel in France, Haiti, India, and finally New York, where she has made her home.

Sheila Isham's work is part of the permanent collections of some of America's most important institutions, including the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Library of Congress, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian, the National Museum for Women in the Arts, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She has been the subject of major one-person exhibitions at the Smithsonian,

the Corcoran, and the Russian Museum, and countless gallery and traveling exhibitions, including at the Island Arts Gallery in Newport, Rhode Island.

Sheila's life has not been without periods of darkness. Susan Fisher Sterling, the chief curator of the National Museum for Women in the Arts, wrote: "In unpredictable and often dramatic ways, Sheila Isham has been challenged by forces that threatened to overwhelm her . . . yet, despite these upheavals, her spirited work prevails."

After a fire destroyed many works in her Washington, DC, studio, Sheila said: "I thought that the burnt studio looked like a painting, like a myth, something you might want to take the picture of. I had to come to terms with that. I became freer in a way."

When her daughter Sandra contracted HIV/AIDS through a blood transfusion, Sheila began work on the enormous, five-painting Victoria series, which she calls "at once a celebration and a working through the darkest period of my life." She said: "It spans all human emotions from love to terror to hope and finally triumph and joy. It is an epic poem in paint, expressed in brilliant color and strong forms." The series was exhibited for the first time in its entirety by the National Museum of Women in the Arts in 2005, 9 years after Sandra passed away.

Sheila Isham's work reflects the iconic melting pot of our Nation's history. Though she draws inspiration from places as diverse as postwar Berlin, Russia, China, Haiti, France, and New York City, her work remains clearly and vibrantly American. Her art, which resides all over the world, is itself an ambassador both for her creative vision and for her country. We are enriched by her talent and her acquaintance.

Alexander Borovsky, head curator of contemporary art at the Russian State Museum, wrote this:

As an artist, Isham is marked by an incredible restlessness. Even the calm of an "oasis" created by her own hand . . . is only relative. She continually explores new paths and returns to the old. Few artists—including Isham, I expect—can say precisely what they are seeking. Having mastered the art of return, Sheila Isham knows to whom it is that she returns—to herself. Truly a rare gift in contemporary art.

I come to the Senate floor today to offer congratulations to Sheila on her 80th birthday. I trust this day will be an occasion for all of us to recognize her extraordinary contribution to American art, and anticipate the many achievements still to come.

TRIBUTE TO SCOTT HIGGINS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I wish to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of petty officer Scott Higgins of my State of Rhode Island, who today will be awarded the Coast Guard Commendation Medal for his efforts in the heroic rescue of the crew of

the sailboat Sean Seamour II off the coast of New Jersey in May.

On May 7, Aviation Machinery Technician 2nd Class Higgins was part of a four-man Coast Guard HH-60 helicopter crew, including LCDR Nevada Smith, LT J.G. Aaron Nelson, and aviation survival technician 2nd class Drew Dazzo, deployed in response to a distress signal from the 44-foot sailing vessel Sean Seamour II. The vessel, on a recreational sailing trip from Green Coves Spring, FL, to Portugal's Azores Islands, had capsized amidst the hurricane-force winds of Subtropical Storm Andrea. The three sailors aboard were forced to evacuate to a small raft just before their ship was swallowed by the ocean.

Higgins, serving as flight mechanic, worked closely with Nelson, who piloted the helicopter, and Dazzo, the team's rescue swimmer, to execute their mission. Working quickly and expertly, Higgins lowered Dazzo over and over again into the towering waves to reach the sailboat crew. Once the first two sailors had been lifted to safety, Higgins and Nelson demonstrated what the Coast Guard's Summary of Action called "the utmost of crew coordination, teamwork and aeronautical skill" as they hoisted Dazzo only 30 feet above the water to position him closer to the life raft and the last survivor.

As Higgins worked to raise the final survivor from the ocean, he felt the hoist cable begin to fray with the rescue basket still 100 feet below the helicopter and the rescue swimmer still in the water. Despite suffering from exhaustion and the effects of saltwater inhalation, Dazzo waited to request an emergency pickup until he could see that the last survivor was in the aircraft.

Again demonstrating extraordinary skill and teamwork in a life-or-death situation, Higgins managed to get the rescued sailor safely aboard and immediately redeploy the compromised hoist cable to retrieve Dazzo. In the midst of an intense storm, all aboard were safely returned to shore.

Higgins and the rest of his team successfully rescued the crew of the Sean Seamour II despite a punishing storm that threatened their lives and the lives of those they were sent to help. As the Coast Guard's Summary of Action stated:

High winds, treacherous seas and extreme off-shore distances created a situation that required intense operational risk management, exacting crew coordination, and incredible skill and courage. Without the complete competence, concentration, and professionalism of every crewmember, this operation could have had a disastrous outcome. Each crewmember was essential to the life saving rescue of three mariners.

The Coast Guard Commendation Medal recognizes meritorious service resulting in unusual and outstanding achievement. The courage, bravery, and skill demonstrated by Machinery Technician Higgins in May shows that he is more than worthy of this great honor.

I offer my congratulations to petty officer Scott Higgins and to all those whom the Coast Guard recognizes today. His achievements have brought honor both to him and to his home state of Rhode Island.

ARTICLE BY RABBI MICHAEL COHEN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I would like to bring to the attention of the Senate an article by Rabbi Michael Cohen who is director of special projects at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies. Rabbi Cohen recently submitted the article entitled "The Genesis of Diversity" to the New York Times. In this article, Rabbi Cohen eloquently reminds us that environmental and biological diversity is not simply a thought or something we simply sit back and observe. Rather we are constant participants in the act of diversity and as such it is our responsibility as human beings to protect our environment. This article serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving environmental and biological diversity during this holiday season.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Rabbi Michael M. Cohen's article entitled "The Genesis of Diversity" be printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

THE GENESIS OF DIVERSITY

(By Rabbi Michael Cohen)

In 1968 Hanukkah and Ramadan ended on the same date. The next day was Christmas Eve. That evening, one quarter of the world's population saw, for the first time, images taken by the Apollo 8 astronauts of the earth from a lunar orbit. The earth, a beautifully colored marble ball floating across the black backdrop of the universe, also looked lonely and vulnerable. Those pictures captured the imagination of the world, triggering something in the consciousness of humanity that gave birth to the environmental movement and, two years later, the first Earth Day.

To frame that moment, a shared historic moment that would transcend all the divisions of the world, the Apollo 8 crew read from the beginning of the Bible, the first ten lines from the Book of Genesis. The opening chapters of Genesis not only include the account of the creation of the earth but over and over tell us of the importance of diversity.

All of creation is called "good," reminding us of the value of the multiplicity of the world that we live in. The text also teaches us, by describing everything that is created before humans as "good," that all things have intrinsic value in and of themselves beyond any value that we may place on them. Once humans are created, "very good" is the adjective applied by the text. An anthropocentric reading of the text would say this is because the world was created for our needs, and once we are in place we can do what we want with the world. A biocentric reading of the text says that "very good" only means that creation as described in the text was complete, and that we humans were the last piece of the biological puzzle.

This reading is supported by the reality that if humans were to disappear from the face of the earth all that had been created

before us would go on quite well, actually better, without our presence. However, if a strata of the diversity of life that had been created before humans were to disappear, we, and all that had been created after it, would no longer exist. In a bit of Heavenly humor on Darwin's survival of the fittest, it is actually the smallest and least physically strong species, like the butterflies, bees, and amoebas, that hold the survival of the world in place. Unlike the other species of the planet, we have the power to commit biocide if we do not protect and preserve those smaller forms of life.

The importance of diversity is emphasized a few chapters later, in the story of Noah, where Noah is told to bring pairs of each species onto the ark so that after the flood they can replenish the earth. After the flood, God places a rainbow in the sky as a reminder to never again destroy the world. It is both a symbol and a metaphor: a single ray of light refracted through water, the basic source of all life, produces a prism of colors. As with the Creation story, we are again reminded that the foundation of diversity is that we all come from one source. On its most profound level, this understanding should give us all the awareness that we have a relationship with and are connected to the rest of humanity and creation.

Immediately following the story of Noah we read about the Tower of Babel. The whole account takes up only nine verses. The conventional reading is that its message is one against diversity; the babel of languages at the end of the story is understood as a punishment. The Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz presents a different reading of the text. For Leibowitz, Babel represents a fascist totalitarian state where the aims of the state are valued more than the individual. In such a society, diverse thought and expression is frowned upon. The text tells us that everyone "had the same language, and the same words."

We read in the genealogies that link the Noah and Babel stories that the "nations were divided by their lands, each one with its own language, according to their clans, by their nations." Leibowitz sees the babel of languages not as a punishment but a corrective return to how things had been and were supposed to be.

That is still our challenge today. Diversity is not a liberal value; it is the way of the world. We know that the environment outside of our human lives is healthier with greater diversity, coral reefs and rain forests being prime examples. It is also true for humanity. We are better off because of the different religions, nations, cultures, and languages that comprise the human family. The Irish Potato Famine was caused because only one variety of potato was planted. Without diverse crops, the disease spread easily on a large and deadly scale.

In one of his State of the Union addresses, former President Bill Clinton said, "This fall, at the White House, one of America's leading scientists said something we should all remember. He said all human beings, genetically, are 99.9 percent the same. So modern science affirms what ancient faith has always taught: the most important fact of life is our common humanity. Therefore, we must do more than tolerate diversity—we must honor and celebrate it."

The opening of the Bible understands diversity not as a noun but as a verb; diversity is the basic action for life as we know it on this planet. Its importance is underscored by the fact that three accounts in its opening chapters highlight diversity as a foundation of the world we live in. Such an orientation is essential for our survival as a species.

DONNA ANTHONY: IN MEMORIAM

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, we have a saying in my Senate office: Once a member of the Harkin family, always a member of the Harkin family. On Monday, with the passing of Donna Anthony, a longtime staffer in my Des Moines office, we lost a very valuable and dear member of our family.

It seems like just yesterday that I was presenting Donna with a pin recognizing her 20 years of service to the people of Iowa as a Senate employee. In Donna's case, that wasn't "service to the people of Iowa" in the abstract; it was service to thousands of individual Iowans whose lives she touched in very real, concrete ways.

Donna was one of those people who give bleeding-heart liberals a good name. She was always on a personal mission to save the world, or at least as many people as she could.

She was constantly taking up the cause of people who are down on their luck, whether it was a senior citizen getting stiffed by Medicare, an immigrant family who desperately needed a visa, a victim of domestic violence, you name it. Her title may have been "caseworker supervisor," but these were not just cases to her, they were people—and she took each one to heart. She put the passion in compassion.

I remember in Catholic school being taught that Saint Jude was the patron saint of lost causes. Well, I was blessed to know Saint Donna, the patron saint of people in dire need. Saint Jude intercedes with God. Saint Donna interceded with the Federal Government—which may be more challenging. She was constantly working her little miracles.

Donna certainly came through for me—again and again. I long ago lost track of the number of people thanking me for the work that Donna did. And her personal loyalty was just extraordinary. She was always looking out for my best interest and for ways to make me look good.

I remember when I was in Iowa Falls this past August, meeting with the economic development group. They had heard about the great work Donna had done for Marshalltown, and they wanted her to do the same for Iowa Falls.

In fact, what she did in Marshalltown was typical of Donna Anthony going the extra mile, going the extra 10 miles. She worked closely with the Marshalltown Chamber of Commerce when they started making their trips to Washington to lobby for assistance. She drove back and forth to Marshalltown for countless meetings and served as an all-round counselor and advocate for their projects. The Marshall County sheriff, Ted Kamanches—a prominent Republican—became a big supporter of mine because of the great work Donna did for his police force, including having a Federal drug task force placed in Marshalltown.

Twenty years ago, Donna started out in my Des Moines office as receptionist